

*Courtesy: House Energy and Commerce Committee*

## **The Digital Television (DTV) Transition:** **Questions and Answers**

What is the digital television (DTV) transition?

- In 1997, to facilitate the transition from analog to digital television, Congress temporarily gave each television broadcaster, for free, a second broadcast channel to transmit in digital format called digital television (DTV).
- DTV offers sharper and wider pictures, and CD-quality sound. Even consumers with analog televisions connected to a converter box or cable or satellite service will receive better service than they did before the transition.
- Broadcasters in a market were supposed to return one of their channels and transmit only in digital format by December 31, 2006. There was a loophole, however, allowing broadcasters to delay return of the spectrum until 85 percent penetration of television households can view a digital signal in their market.
- As part of the Deficit Reduction Act, Congress establishes December 31, 2008 as the hard date for this transition from analog television to digital television.
- As a result, televisions that only receive analog broadcast signals over-the-air will need a digital-to-analog converter box to receive digital television.

What are the benefits of Completing the Digital Television Transition?

- **Making communities safer.** Some police, fire departments, and rescue squads already have radio equipment to communicate over the spectrum the broadcasters are supposed to return—they are just awaiting the turnover. Many more public safety officials cannot purchase equipment or begin planning without a date certain. Notably, last year the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (or 9-11 Commission) recommended the expedited return of this spectrum to improve homeland security.

- **Bringing new services to consumers and lowering prices.** The commercial uses for the spectrum are practically limitless, such as accelerated deployment of wireless broadband capabilities (especially to rural areas) and more competitive choices for high-speed voice, video and data applications.
- **Reducing the federal deficit.** This particular spectrum is highly valuable, called “beachfront property” by some, and its auction will bring billions of dollars in additional revenue to the U.S. Treasury to reduce the deficit. Several studies suggest that the auction could raise \$20-30 billion, and garner hundreds of billions of dollars in additional benefits and savings to consumers and the U.S. economy.
- **Growing the economy and creating new jobs.** The development of products and services to utilize this spectrum will improve America’s global competitiveness and result in significant investment, boosting our economy and fostering new jobs.

### Is Congress imposing a “Television Tax”?

- No. The Digital Television Transition Act establishes a Consumer Assistance Converter-Box Program which allows every U.S. household to request up to two \$40 coupons to use toward the purchase of digital-to-analog converter boxes.
  - Households are eligible for coupons regardless of income or whether they subscribe to cable or satellite services.
  - Consumers may obtain request forms at government buildings, and may also obtain and submit the forms electronically.
  - Manufacturers are estimating that analog-to-digital television converter boxes will be available for purchase beginning in January of 2008 and will cost approximately \$60 by the time the hard date occurs.
  - The Congressional Budget Office has reviewed the converter-box program and determined that the program is fully-funded.

### How will consumers find out about the digital television transition?

- The DTV Transition Act requires an aggressive consumer education program. Manufacturers, retailers, broadcasters, cable providers, satellite providers, consumer groups, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will be required to educate and assist consumers about the hard deadline, the converter-box program, and what steps consumers may need to take to continue using analog-only televisions.

### How will this benefit first responders?

- Currently, many radios used by first responders are tuned to frequencies that are scattered across the radio.
- The auction of this spectrum will provide firemen, police and other first responders with the ability to better communicate, achieving critical interoperability.

### Will cable and satellite TV viewers will be affected by the transition?

- *The hard deadline will have little impact on the ability to view broadcast programming for the vast majority of television households—approximately 85 percent—that subscribe to cable or satellite services.*
- These households will either view programming on a digital television connected to their cable or satellite service, or their cable or satellite operators will convert the programming to work on their analog televisions.